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Soc 4.01.2 The War That
Never Was

P-Ayers, BRADLEY EARL

A disquieting indictment of CIA's past work in Cuba

The War That Never Was, by Bradley Earl Ayers. Indianapolis, Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill. 235 pp. \$8.95.

By James Nelson Goodsell

In all the barrage of attention focused on the Central Intelligence Agency of late, precious little has been revealed about the men and

Books

women who carry out its operations. Most accounts of CIA activities deal with them on a very impersonal level. Perhaps this should not seem surprising since the agency's rules make extremely difficult the publication of uncensored material by CIA employees, both past and present.

But what happens when a regular army officer, on detached duty to the CIA, becomes dis-

gruntled with the whole business and decides to tell all?

Apparently, there isn't much the CIA can do to prevent it — and that's how Bradley Earl Ayers came to write his account of CIA covert operations against Cuba in 1963-64. Ayers, who was a captain in the army at the time but has since resigned his commission, quite obviously approved of the operations at the time — and still does.

Yet his book is a devastating indictment of those operations, which sought to train an anti-Castro guerrilla team at hidden bases in south Florida. The team was composed of Cuban exiles who bitterly detested Fidel Castro and his government of their island. Ayers, a specialist in commando operations, was charged with beefing up the operation.

As he describes it in "The War That Never Was," the whole CIA effort was chaotic, poorly conceived, ill-staffed, and inadequately equipped. Through much of 1963, he sought to

reorganize and revitalize the training program and apparently won a good deal of admiration for his own efforts from the Cubans with whom he worked. He even accompanied them on several of their missions and rendezvous, engaging in a couple of fights with Cuban patrol boats.

But Ayers was never very happy with Washington's direction of the operation. Read that, the CIA's direction. Moreover, following the assassination of President Kennedy in November, 1963, the program began to lose impetus. New policies were being mapped in Washington. To Ayers, they smacked of giving up the fight against Castro which by this time he had taken on as his own personal mission.

Throughout the story runs Ayers's own personal tragedy — his increasing estrangement from his wife and three sons, leading to a divorce and other unhappiness. Ayers's world — both professional and personal — seemed to unravel.

One reads Ayers's account and wonders how many such tragedies have resulted from the CIA imbroglios of the past 15 years? How much in the way of energy and effort have been directed on projects such as clandestine Cuban training programs, only to have them scrubbed by changes of policy in Washington? Should those programs have been started in the first place? Ayers obviously would say the Cuba program was right, although many would disagree. And there is also the personal question: how many families have been disrupted by the CIA activities that perhaps need not have been?

Ayers doesn't answer these broader questions, but he does give valuable insight into one controversial area of CIA operations. It is disquieting.

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